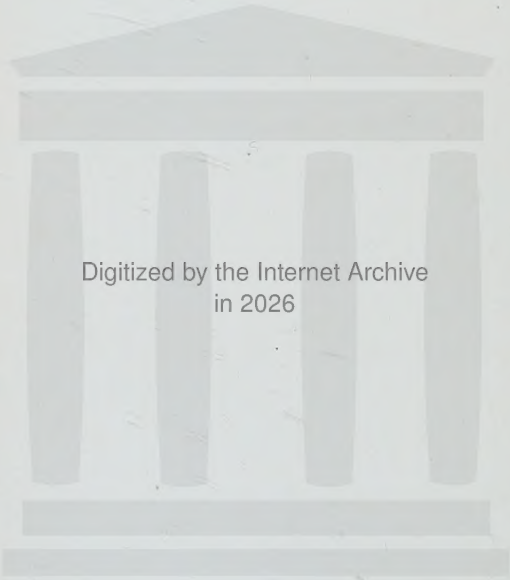
THE POINT of CONTACT IN TEACHING

PATTERSON DU BOIS

BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA


Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/pointofcontracin0000patt

The Point of Contact in Teaching

The Point of Contact In Teaching

BY

PATTERSON DU BOIS

Formerly a Secretary of the American Philosophical Society
Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, etc.

FOURTH EDITION REVISED AND ENLARGED

NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD & COMPANY
1909

GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL UNION
LIBRARY
1962

Property of
CBSK
Please return to
Graduate Theological
Union Library

LC
377
D92
1900

COPYRIGHT, 1896 AND 1900
BY
PATTERSON DU BOIS

D 852

By the same author

BECKONINGS FROM LITTLE HANDS

11601

PREFACE

THE child mind is a castle that can be taken neither by stealth nor by storm. But there is a natural way of approach and a gate of easy entry always open to him who knows how to find it.

The ideal point at which a child's intelligent attention is to be first engaged, or his instruction is to begin, is an experience or point of contact with life. One who understands this truth need seldom have any great difficulty in getting an entry into the child's mind.

This little manual is an expansion of a small monograph issued in 1896 under the title "Beginning at the Point of Contact." Being written originally in the interest of better educational standards in the Sunday-school it won its way into request by the primary workers. But certain secular normal-

school teachers, discovering its general educational utility, quickly appropriated a large part of the edition.

With the demand for republication came the suggestion that amplification would increase its practical value. The new matter now forms so considerable a part of the whole as to render the present manual practically a new work. Numerous illustrative examples have been included, showing how the principle has been applied in dealing with individual pupils, with classes, with schools, and even with peoples in more or less primitive stages of life.

The dissertation on the construction of primary Bible courses is reserved for the last chapter, as not being necessary to the mere exposition of the general principle, but as being a legitimate outcome and illustration of it.

August, 1896.

PREFACE TO FOURTH EDITION

Since the first issue of "The Point of Contact in Teaching," it has come into large use by various classes of secular as well as religious teachers, no less than by writers of Sunday-school lesson courses and lesson helps. It has attracted the attention of kindergartners and normal schools, and has gained a place in at least one divinity school. Like all key phrases or catchwords, its title has suffered some deterioration from loose use or over use where its real significance has not been perfectly understood. On the other hand, the author has found the title adopted and rightly applied, as a working principle, by special teachers and students among whom the book was scarcely expected to circulate, much less to prove popular.

It therefore seemed best to thoroughly revise the book, with the twofold purpose of

making still more emphatic and clear just what the "point of contact" at the "plane of experience" means, and of illustrating the universality of the essential principle in teaching or reaching all sorts and conditions of untutored minds, from the innocent child in our homes and primary schools to the barbarian of the mission field.

This has necessitated considerable change, both by excision and by expansion. Certain matters of temporary interest have been eliminated in favor of those aspects of the subject which are of permanent and universal import. The book is nevertheless substantially the same, though fuller and more complete in demonstration. There is no variance in essential purport between the first three editions and this revision.

April, 1900.

CONTENTS

PAGE

I

THE GENERAL PRINCIPLE . . . 1

II

THE PLANE OF EXPERIENCE . . 19

III

APPLYING THE PRINCIPLE . . . 47

IV

MISSING THE POINT 83

V

THE LESSON MATERIAL . . . 101

I

THE GENERAL PRINCIPLE

I

THE GENERAL PRINCIPLE

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,"—but for me he created them not until he created me. Heaven and earth had no beginning, so far as I am concerned, until my powers of perceiving them had their beginning. So, although as a newborn infant I am the latest act of God's work of creation, my experience, my contact with life, is my book of beginnings. Heaven and earth start into existence in my home, my parents, my baby-rattle. In my chronology, my father's gold watch precedes the sun, a silver dollar antedates the moon, and my mother's jewels anticipate the stars. My world is without form, and void. But by this I mean not what the Bible Book of Genesis means.

Things gradually assume shape as I per-

ceive their relations, and come to know them through my personal experience. The seasons, you say, have their beginning in the movement of the earth around the sun, but that movement has its beginning for me in the seasons. The light of day has its real beginning in the sun, but for me the sun has its beginning in the light of day. My infantile experience is my infantile book of beginnings,—my Genesis.

That which is historically first may be logically last, and what is logically first may be historically last; or, as Aristotle puts it, "that which is first as cause is last in discovery." The Creation as recorded in the Bible comes historically before my birth; but logically my knowledge of the sun must begin with the light in my room, my study of the rock strata must begin with the stones in the garden path; of the waters, with my morning bath; of the animals, with my pussy or the flies. It is the proximate and the immediate rather than the remote and the final that appeals to me as a child.

Not only do these illustrations represent a cardinal principle of approach to the little child's mind, but to a large extent they indicate the only royal road to success, the "line of least resistance" in dealing with those primitive and untutored peoples who are infants in knowledge of any kind.

Nothing is so truly known as that which is known through a self-active personal experience. "Know that thou hast no knowledge but what thou hast got by working," says Carlyle. Therefore it is at a point in this experiential knowing that we can begin to instruct the child to the best advantage. Indeed, it is only where we touch his life interests that we can be said to instruct him at all. It is doubtful whether, strictly speaking, we can even be said to create interests in others. As Miss Harriet M. Scott startlingly says, "The most we can do is to expand or enrich an already existent interest." This point in life interests or experiences I call the Point of Contact, because it is the point at which the child's experience and the lesson

he is to learn can be brought into contact with each other,—or, better, the one evolved from the other. Starting with something which the child knows through experience, and is therefore personally interested in, the subject is thenceforth to be progressively developed. If this development of new truth is really a legitimate unfolding, a "natural development of his own interests, it is his own, it is really himself."

We must begin where we find the child,—as Colonel Parker puts it. The only place where we can be sure to find him is at some point on the plane of a child's natural experiences or contact with life. It is of no use to start with an abstract statement, motto, text or doctrine of any kind. Every one must do his own abstracting. Out of the concrete, objective experiences of life only can we deduce or generalize our abstractions of knowledge. An experience may be non-sensuous, internal,—emotional, or spiritual, it is true, —but with this we have comparatively little to do in our first approach to the child mind.

It is at the point of the child's sense contact with the external world that the opportunity for our best appeal to him lies. All imagery must be made of the raw material furnished by the sense perception.[1] And be it re-

[1] Pestalozzi says: "The starting-point of thought is sense impression,—the direct impression, that is, produced by the world on our internal and external senses. . . . It is life that educates." This is altogether a different thing from addressing our primary instruction to sense perception as such. As Dr. William T. Harris says: "Thought deals with the dynamic element of experience rather than with mere things, which are only static results." We are quite on the child's plane of experience when we address his sense of wonder, curiosity, love, or fear. But we know less of those points in his experience, and cannot often be so sure that we are making a close contact with his real experiential life as we can when we seek a point of departure in his obvious natural experience with the external world. Notwithstanding the great differences between Pestalozzi and Froebel this principle is not essentially at variance with either. It is true that Miss Blow sharply contrasts these two greatest masters as to their pivotal ideas when she says: "Pestalozzi claims that the centre from which education radiates is sense perception (*Anschauung*). Froebel claims that this centre is *Gemüth*, a word explained by Hegel to mean the 'undeveloped, indefinite

membered here that, as Professor Dewey says, "the image is the great instrument of instruction. What a child gets out of any subject presented to him is simply the images which he himself forms with regard to it."

What Miss Blow calls the "point of departure" is simply the starting-point in the teaching process; but this point of departure must be at the child's point of contact with experiential life. In looking for this point let us not forget the words of Rousseau: "Childhood has ways of seeing, thinking, feeling, peculiar to itself; nothing is more absurd than to wish to substitute ours in their place."

The idea of the relative value of possible

totality of spiritual being.' We may approximately translate *Gemüth* by 'heart,' and affirm that with Froebel the pivot upon which true education turns is the regeneration of the affections." But it is also true that in Froebel's mother-play "the point of departure is usually some actual experience of the children." However, there is no intention of entering here upon a philosophical discussion, but merely to point out a practical way of approach to and procedure with the child mind.

starting-points for the child's development as determined by their closeness or familiarity to the child through his own experience, is well illustrated in a discussion between Miss Youmans and Dr. Mary P. Jacobi in the matter of teaching botany to children. The noticeable thing is that the child is to approach the science in a direction opposite to, or at least different from, that from which the mature scientist approaches it. For the child, that point of the plant's life which is out of sight, underground, is logically, or pedagogically, late, although in the plant's history it is first.

An article on "The Scientific Method with Children" in The Popular Science Monthly, by Henry Lincoln Clapp, says children "have their own starting-points, and these should be taken by the teacher. . . . Dr. Jacobi would use the flower, in beginning to teach children botany, because it is the most attractive, makes the largest impression upon the senses, is easy of apprehension, and leads to the appreciation of specific differ-

ences. . . . Miss Youmans would begin with the leaf, on the assumption that it is simpler than the flower, and, in tracing its scientific relations, deeper intellectual pleasure is received. . . . Beginning with roots, as so many systematic teachers have done, and following with stem, leaves, flowers, and ending with fruits as the ultimate work of the plant, although logical to adults, full of regular sequences, and scientific from one standpoint, is unscientific from another.

"Children do not start to work with plants in that way unless they are obliged to, but in a way diametrically opposite,—attractive flowers and fruits first, and unattractive roots last. It is certainly natural, although it may be heathenish, and show their natural depravity, for them to do so. . . . An extensive use of imported material is directly opposed to Agassiz's injunction to use the material nearest at hand. Moreover, it is worth while to remember that materials and methods which are serviceable enough in teaching adults often become forced and me-

chanical in teaching children. It should not be taken for granted that the teacher's sequences, laboriously studied out, . . . are the pupil's sequences, or that he can assimilate them."

Now the great fault in our religious teaching of the child has been that we have not sought his most penetrable point. Our approach to him has been through adult ideas, upon an adult plane, complicated with conventionality, institutionalism, and abstractions. We have not sufficiently regarded the plane of his experience as the essential way of approach to him. Observe, I do not locate this plane as either high or low; it is neither, and it is both, according to what your terms mean. It is in some ways higher than ours, in some ways lower. Let that pass.

We have stood upon our adult plane of complex thought and conventionality to manipulate the little child's current of thought running on a very different plane. True, we have spoken baby-talk to him, but in that

baby-language we have spoken to him truths unsuited to babies, and because he was seemingly entertained with our antics we supposed that we succeeded in our effort to make an adult baby of him. Our Lord did not teach in that way. See how he made the people think by finding their point of contact with their common occupations and surroundings, and proceeding from this starting-point to whatever truth he had in view for them. Like him, we must address pupils on the level of their experiential life.

We have made too much, for instance, of time sequences. The young child has a very inadequate conception of chronology. History as history—a record of impersonal, or intricately related events, of remote causes and effects—is wholly out of his plane. His sequences are of a different sort. So, too, we have made too much of points of doctrine and forms of theological reasoning, and of an objective life utterly foreign and remote from child experience. A writer in The Church Standard, C. E. Hutchison, says: "We have

lessons in the Catechism crammed with words over which grown people have been fighting for centuries, and about which they do not yet agree. And there are laborious series on the Bible, full of information about the structure of Jewish houses, the order of service in the synagogue, suggestions for special investigation, and the like." The child's plane, on the contrary, is level only to the activities and appreciations of immediate life.

Leaders in educational and pedagogical thought have long seen the radical defect in our Sunday-school, as indeed in all our religious instruction of the little children. The Sunday-school has been severely criticised as an educational institution. Notwithstanding the truth in such criticism we know the Sunday-school to be one of the grandest and most aggressive of Christian institutions. But we ought not to be above learning from our critics. An article some years ago in The Westminster Review gives forth no uncertain sound, thus:

"Theology should not be forced upon the

child's mind at a very early age. . . . A child's first idea of spiritual things, if these are presented to him in the phraseology usually employed for the purpose, is necessarily a false one, made so by his natural substitution of the concrete for the abstract. This fact often receives practical confirmation from the quaint notions children are found to have formed about religion; the absurdity of the questions to which these notions give rise is a frequent cause of amusement to their elders, but it none the less furnishes conclusive evidence of the confusion that prevails in many little minds. Premature instruction relating to the spiritual side of religion thus leads the child into errors which have to be corrected by subsequent experience, and the false ideas resulting from it form an undesirable starting-point in religious instruction."

Where, then, will the desirable starting-point be found? *In the general range or on the plane of characteristic childhood experiences, and especially those which arise from the child's immediate contact with the external world.* Out

of the child's own self-active life must come that which makes knowledge power—or, better, which transmutes mere instruction or information into personal efficiency. Life is the great interpreter and educator.

Here let it be said, once for all, that in this manual "the child" usually means a child under eight years of age. Years do not regulate everything, but they do regulate some things. Span of time is an essential to the reaching of a certain plane of experience, a certain sight-level, a grade of development. A forced cultivation of brain cells, natural precocity or intelligence, will never put a child just where an accumulation of conscious years will. A child or a man may be such a prodigy in arithmetic as to make gigantic calculations in a moment of time. He may have such a phenomenal memory that he can repeat verbatim the contents of a newspaper after one reading. He may have powers like these, and yet be dependent on common experience for just that development which such experience alone can bring. He

must have a sense of the process of time, or of conscious intervals, behind him, in order to have a definite historic consciousness. And the younger the child the more applicable is this truth of child nature.

In his outlook and in his general mental method a child of six is farther from a child of ten or twelve than a child of twelve is from a young man of twenty. A child of six and a normal child of nine should not be in a class together.

The general principle, then, is, that in the child's instruction we must begin at his point of contact with objective or external life *as he sees it*. Life, it is true, includes the inner experiences,—appetites, desires, affections, etc.—as well as those which are sensory and peripheral. But it is in the region of the latter, it is upon the plane of those experiences which he gets in his sense contact with the external world, that we must usually start with him. The inner life of intentions, emotions, affections, appreciations, must not be turned back on itself for objective con-

temptation. A child loves, fears, hates, enjoys; but he does not mentally handle enjoyment, hatred, fear, or love, objectively. The child's prime interest is in the concrete object of sense. This is well illustrated by the study of children's letters. I quote from an article on this subject in The (London) Spectator (September 23, 1893). The writer says:

"Children's letters are always concrete. They write about what they are doing, not about what they are thinking, and at greater length about the achievements of other people and animals than about their own. Looking through a pile of old letters from children, mostly girls of all ages, from four to thirteen, the writer finds nearly three-quarters devoted to careful accounts of cats, dogs, tame mice, a donkey, 'Joey,' a 'ginipig,' 'rabits,' chickens, goats, and innumerable pigeons. There is hardly a word about themselves or their feelings in the whole collection, though the health, wants, and probable sentiments of the animals are treated at great length and with every diversity of spelling. Lists of 'what the pigeons have got,' such as 'the fantail, two babies and one egg; the Jocobin, two eggs,' and so on, are followed by other lists of 'ones that have got nobody.'"

That the child's experiences are concrete rather than abstract, simple rather than complex, immediate rather than remote, will be more fully illustrated in the next chapter.

II

THE PLANE OF EXPERIENCE

II

THE PLANE OF EXPERIENCE

As a practical matter, the point of entry to any child's mind depends upon the individuality of his life; but in dealing with classes we must make sacrifices of the individual for the many. Of course we lose in effectiveness by this, and, so far, the single pupil is the ideal class. But, on the contrary, the single pupil loses the advantage of the social relation. All class teaching is therefore a compromise process.

We can appeal to childhood from the general plane or ordinary range of experiences most characteristic of childhood. Says H. Courthope Bowen, "What interests a child must be immediate and level to his thoughts. He cannot realize a far-off advantage; or, at any rate, he cannot feel it for long. Young and old, we all experience delight in discover-

ing, or in being helped to see, connections between isolated facts,—especially such as we have ourselves picked up."

Manifestly the plane of experience, the germination of interest, the genesis of study, will be a simple, rather than a complex, concrete rather than abstract. As Lange says, "the numerous concrete, fresh, and strong ideas gained in earliest youth are the best helps to apperception for all subsequent learning." But these germinal ideas have no affiliation with the "regular sequences" of theology; they will not be found in the local, political, or religious issues, or the imagery of Ezekiel, Haggai, Zechariah, Nehemiah, Nahum, Micah, or Habakkuk, or the complex rituals and regulations of the Mosaic era. Supposing "the elders of the Jews" did build and prosper "through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo,"—what is that to a babe who has no conception of space, time, organized society, or even of our commonest adult conventionalities? How near are the Ten

Commandments to the plane of experience of a child who cannot count up to ten—nor above four?

Nor is there experimental contact in such a "golden text" as "The Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee;" nor in "We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them." Even for such a text as "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God," one requires considerable prior knowledge before it can be assimilated into the life and become formative of character. To force these on the child is what that remarkable teacher, Thring of Uppingham, would call "an effort to pour into a reluctant mind some unintelligible bit of cipher knowledge and to cork it down by punishment. It disagrees, it ferments, the cork flies out, the noxious stuff is spilt; whilst the taskmaster believes it is all right because of the trouble he took to get it in."

Deliberately to select a Scripture portion

so remote from the plane of experience of little children, and then suppose that, *because* it is God's Word, God will work a miracle in order that they may understand it, seems hardly less than presumptuous mockery. The responsibility is upon us to see that truths are presented to the children in an order consistent with their capability to receive those truths through experiential beginnings. And this is not to be done by paraphernalia, or by parrot verbal memorizing, or by the awakening of a pseudo attention through mere spectacular exhibits of hearts, ladders, crosses, crowns, and blackboard intricacies which might make an adult dizzy if they did not bewilder children.

Take this text, which, before now, has been given to little children: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." How absurd to attempt to force a conception here! Let us not deceive ourselves into thinking that such memorizings have a future value. Says Froebel: "At a

later period of life, when comprehension attaches a sense to the sound, the senseless word will be the more injurious."

To say that a child has enjoyed committing to memory—or any other task, for that matter—proves little. Nothing is more seductive to the teacher than the child's enjoyment or delight in his task. Not that he should not delight in it, but the delight may entirely mislead us as to its cause. "It is possible," says President G. Stanley Hall, "that the present shall be so attractive and preoccupying that the child never once sends his thoughts to the remote in time and place." This "present" may be mere verbal jingle, it may be the artificial paraphernalia of the primary room, or anything but the concept which the adult observer is laboring to lodge in a mind impenetrable to it.

The points of contact of most children with the worlds of matter and of thought are at once numerous and few. Investigations conducted under the direction of President Hall upon large numbers of Boston school-

children, just after they had entered the lowest grade of the primary school, say six years old, revealed that 35 per cent. had never seen the country, 20 per cent. did not know where milk came from, 55 per cent. did not know that wooden things were made from trees, 47 per cent. never saw a pig, from 13 to 18 per cent. did not know where their cheek, forehead, or throat was, and fewer yet knew elbow, wrist, ribs, etc. More than three-fourths of the children had never seen, to know them, any of the common cereals, trees, or vegetables, growing. These facts indicate how slenderly furnished the child's mind is for a discussion involving theologies, chronologies, successive wars, political complications, Judaizing tendencies, obscure imageries and prophetic references, ancient ritual usages, tribal dissensions, and the like.

President Hall well asks, "What idea can the 18 per cent. of children who thought a cow no larger than its picture, get from all instruction about hide, horns, milk?" This is a pertinent question, *mutatis mutandis*, for

whoever is to make lesson-courses for our primary Sunday-schools, even more than for those who are to teach them. To tell the average six-year old that "the price of a virtuous woman is far above rubies," simple as it sounds to us, presupposes an experience in the matter of relative values, of precious stones, of marketable abstractions. Is this any better than teaching about the unknown cow by an account of unknown horns, hide, etc.?

In the same line of revelation as Dr. Hall's, Superintendent O. J. Laylander propounded such plain questions as "Why should we do good?" "What is Sunday for?" "Where is heaven?" "What do children do in heaven?" "What do the angels do?" to children varying from six to ten years. Here are a few specimen answers. "Angels wear plain white clothes, and don't look stylish." "Have nice hair and wear nice gowns." "Angels come down and tell men when they burn sheep what to do."

Other answers, about the Divine appearance, etc., while they are not irreverent, seem

almost shocking to us, and need not be repeated here; it is natural for the child to be concrete and direct. One does not have to look far to discover the sensuous origin of most, if not all, of these answers,—perhaps not outside of some of our homes and Sunday-schools. Some of them are at least a serious reflection on the advisability of displaying crude chromos or any other form of portraiture of our Lord. It is indeed a question how far the picturing of spirit is advisable. To the child's imagination such a draught is more likely to be narcotic than stimulating. It is often better that a hero be left unpictured or unseen.

It is easy to see that the ideally exact point of departure or genesis of a child's education in any sphere is an experience, or contact with the world, peculiar to that child. For a certain little girl's recitation from Longfellow I chose a part of the potter's song in "Kéramos"—with great success. But this was largely because she had visited a pottery, and had come into actual sense contact with, and so acquired an interest in, the processes

of the potter's wheel. And yet she was not a potter's daughter and in two or three years her recollection of the visit to the pottery became dim—and with it her remembrance of the poem also faded. The potter's wheel was not strictly in the plane of her experience even though she had been once in her life an interested spectator of it. Yet, if a recitation from Longfellow must be made, this was the best approach to a point of contact with her life that was available. Does not much of our scriptural teaching similarly die out because it has been fundamentally inapt to the child's plane of ordinary experience?

The more closely anything lies to our personal experience, and the nearer it is to the level of our ordinary vision, the more easily do we become interested in it, and the better starting-point is it, therefore, from which to follow a line of thought. This is not peculiar to the child, but is common to all. The range of experience is much more extensive in the adult than in the child. Every one knows that, when he has been through a par-

ticular form of experience, he has always a peculiar interest in others who are passing through that same experience. A person who has been rescued from a burning building in the middle of the night will run to the window to see the fire department go by, when, previously to his rescue, he would have paid very little attention to it. A person who has contracted what he supposes to be an unusual disease is surprised to discover many other persons who have been, or are, afflicted in the same way.

Let me illustrate now a little more particularly this matter of the plane of experience, or levels of sight, or points of view.

My friend Mrs. B., after the lawn was mowed, quoted to her husband, "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass" (Ps. lxxii. 6). Mr. B., who had been brought up on a farm, and was accustomed to regard rain upon grass which was drying into hay as deleterious, never was able to get any spiritual use out of this text. His point of contact was with his experience as a haymaker.

Mrs. B.'s was with her experience as a lawn-keeper. Consequently they had not interpreted the verse in the same way. One had applied it to the grass that was cut off for hay; the other, to the remaining grass from which the hay had been cut. In each case life was the interpreter and educator.

Again, an intelligent and studious child in her ninth year was, with her father's assistance, studying the Sunday-school lesson on "The Cities of Refuge." She had never heard the word "refuge," and her father explained, as well as he could, first what the idea of refuge is, and then what a city of refuge was. She went to Sunday-school, and the teacher, in order to vivify the lesson, told a dreadful story of the torture which some boys had inflicted upon a companion. The child was so shocked by the horror that it was some time before it lost its hold on her nerves. The idea of the city of refuge seemed to have made no impression on her at all, although it was, of course, explained to her a second time in the class.

Six months later she visited the old fort at St. Augustine. It was altogether a different sort of thing from what she supposed a fort to be. In discussing it with her father, the various wars in which it had played a part were spoken of, and then the father said that it had done great service as a place of refuge for the inhabitants of the adjacent town during an attack by the Indians. The child immediately asked, "What is a refuge?" The explanations of the term which she had received a half-year before had gone for nothing. The father tried to recall the Bible lesson of the previous term, but to little purpose. Refuges, as such, had not come within the plane of her experience until now, and hence the definition of them, and the lesson upon them, amounted to little. There had been no experiential life to act as interpreter. The explanation had to be made over again with the object in actual view, the father recalling the lesson on the cities of refuge and so establishing a life connection.

Now let us look at the plane of experience

in this case, and the relative degrees of immediateness to, or remoteness from, the child's circumstantial interest. Being herself a temporary inhabitant of the town as a visitor, the flight of the inhabitants to the fort for refuge came closely within the range of her imagination—or fancied experience. It is true she had never experienced such an event as a flight for life, but she was close enough to the conditions to be able—by raising herself, through her imagination, on her tiptoes, metaphorically—to come fairly within sight of the experience of a refugee.

Again, suppose she had actually been herself a refugee from the Indians in a place of safety. The idea of the fort as a place of refuge would have been far more vivid, more intensely real. In either case there was an excellent point of contact with experience from which to teach the idea of refuge in time of danger. But in one case the contact would have been closer than in the other. In one instance, she had sufficient sensory knowledge of the place to imagine the ex-

perience with fair correctness; in the other, she would have had an actual experience. But without some such basis any instruction would have conveyed little impression. In the Sunday-school class the city of refuge had no basis whatever in life experience, and what the imagination could do, therefore, was so weak that it soon dropped out of her mental furniture.

Let us now take another case showing a conscious resistance of the child to the attempt to force upon him truths of nature by bringing them wrong end foremost or foreign to his experiential plane. I condense and quote from an article by Mrs. Mary C. Cutler in The Sunday School Times. She tells of an enthusiastic high-school girl who, having become interested in geology, decided to use her knowledge as the basis of bedtime tales for her little brother.

"Wouldn't Robbie like to have each night a part of a great, long story, all about how the earth was made?" she asked one evening soon afterward.

"P'raps so," he answered, somewhat doubtfully.

"Will you tell how the sidewalks were made?" he added, seeming a little more interested.

"Oh, yes!" replied his sister; "only we want to know first how the ground was made to lay the sidewalks on."

And so the story had gone on night after night, while Robbie had shown varying degrees of interest, but never quite so much as his sister had expected. She tried her best to adapt the story to his comprehension, and sometimes felt much encouraged; as when she was telling about the formation of the coal-beds, and showed him a piece of coal she had found, which seemed to have markings on it like the bark of a tree; or, at another time, when she showed him a picture of the huge bird-tracks that had been found in other formations.

But now and then Robbie would ask some question about the sidewalks, showing that his interest was centred on that with which he had first become acquainted in experience. The sidewalks were his "point of contact" with, and his first interest in, earth structure. It was because he hoped to learn some time how the sidewalks were made, that he was trying to listen patiently to all the rest of the story.

And so on this night Robbie settled himself down in his corner of the chair, and was very quiet. He asked his sister no more questions. For the first time his eyes began to droop before she had finished.

"I must try to make it more interesting," she said to herself as she kissed him good-night. . . .

Years afterward, when our school-girl had grown

older and wiser, she learned how abnormal, as well as unsatisfying, had been her method,—that she ought to have begun with what the child already knew something about, and was interested in, and thence she could have led him whither she would. To the high-school girl the sidewalks were laid on the ground; to the child, the ground was hidden under the sidewalks. His first experience with earth was not the underlying ground, but the overlying sidewalks. She had vainly thought to begin at the beginning of God's works, instead of the real beginning of knowledge-getting,—the "point of contact" with the world as the child sees it.

Now to go farther. Whatever interest is common to Christianity and heathenism is the point of sympathy at which the missionary can most hopefully begin. This may be at a point of contact with the religious life of the heathen, an attitude, an act, a rite, a hope, or something which has become already a part of his religious experience. There will be different starting-points for the Brahman, the Mohammedan, the Confucian; the educational genesis for the Bushman will be different from that for the North American Indian.

A teacher at Hampton Institute, Miss Annie Beecher Scoville, told me that as a matter of fact the Indians can be more easily reached through the story of the early Hebrews than can the negro. The Indian feels a certain affiliation with Abraham which the negro does not. The life experience of the Indian is nomadic and closely akin to the Orientals. The "point of departure" or starting-point, in teaching the Indian, might therefore differ from that in teaching the negro, who touches life in experiences of quite a different nature.

One of the most beautifully apt and convincing illustrations of the necessity of addressing primitive minds from their own plane of experience is found in a private letter received from the Rev. W. Govan Robertson, a missionary in British Central Africa. He says: "I have sought in vain for a suitable abstract of Bible history which might be translated. 'Peep of Day' we have, and it answers a certain purpose 'Line upon Line' has been tried, but neither appeals to the

native mind. There is something far too goody-goody in the phraseology to permit a *translation*. 'My dear children,' 'Poor Daniel,' 'How glad he must have been,' 'How beautiful it must have been to see the angels,' and so on, are not translatable. The scenes of civilization are too often brought in, and the illustrations fall flat. What is wanted is something vigorous, not requiring much imagination to understand, based on wild native life—very much like the life of the old Israelites."

The principal difficulty encountered in teaching these Africans is just the difficulty which we encounter, expressed in reverse terms. The Africans find no point of contact with our civilization and modes of thought. Our little children have few points of contact with ancient Oriental life and modes of thought. There is a suggestion of caution here in the too easy satisfaction with which the Twenty-third Psalm is given prominence in the primary-school curriculum. But, of this, more hereafter.

It is even true of ourselves that these remote Orientalisms confuse and perplex us. How many can read through the Prophets with any clear apprehension of the significance of allusion, historical or poetical, made by those writers? Certainly a large majority of fairly intelligent teachers on reading those books gain only a general sense of something poetic, something historical, something religious. The unsatisfaction which such readers feel under such circumstances is somewhat parallel with the unsatisfied child's mind after a "lesson" wherein the whole basis of thought or action is abstract, or is external, remote from, and foreign to, his life experiences. But the child cannot help himself. Because we make the presentation entertaining with sentimental talk and ingenious illustrative appliances, we imagine that he is realizing, or re-living, the whole remote situation.

Mrs. Annie Trumbull Slosson's famous "Fishin' Jimmy" never got hold of Christ until his plane of experience was struck,—and that the fishing interest. Jimmy was

practically insulated from salvation until that one spot of contact was discovered, and forthwith the current flowed. But the Book of Romans would not have availed, nor would Genesis have proved a genesis for him.

And what about the fairy story? Has the child ever had actual *experience* in fairyland? No, in so far as there is no real fairyland—and Yes, inasmuch as the essentials of fairy life are just those of child life. Both are capricious, both ignore conditions of time, space, and natural cause and effect; both are spontaneous, lawless, incongruous, yet instinct with dreams of unlimited power and autocratic purpose. Between the child and the fairy there is a very close resemblance and a natural affiliation. They live usually on a common plane. Materialistic reality compels their separation at points only to find them in search of one another again.

Any one who does not realize how widely the adult and the childhood planes are separated will do well to discover, after a ten minutes' conversation with a child, precisely how

far the child understood him, and how far he understood the child. Let him take Longfellow or Bryant, for instance, and discover, if he can, how little there is in these poets within the range of the child's vision, and how much on another plane altogether. Let him go farther and put Eugene Field to the test, and he will find a very small proportion of his work really on the plane of child life.

Again, let any one take a child of from five to eight into a legislative, or deliberative, assembly for the first time, and attempt to explain the proceedings. Every time he puts his foot down in order to take a step forward in his explanation to the child, he will find that he has stepped into a quicksand. The very idea of representation in government, of passing bills, making motions, and especially of controlling distant sections of country by these processes, is something entirely outside of the child's life-plane. It is not merely a question of the meaning of words, but it is one of complex, unseen, and unsuspected relations, one of motives affecting the social

organism of which the child has little apprehension. It is one of generalizations, for the construction of which the child is unfurnished with basal particulars.

During the great railway strike in Philadelphia, I closely watched some little boys who, having caught the destructive spirit of the mob, came in and played their part in the demonstration of vengeance against the railway company. What understanding had these juvenile offenders of what they appeared to be doing? The sociological and economic question between the labor unions and the railway corporation was doubtless entirely foreign to the plane of their thought. But the self-active impulse to change conditions by destruction, was quite within their range.

It ought to be evident, then, that the same set of facts or phenomena may be viewed on entirely different planes. A child may seem attentive, interested, and even zealous, and yet be entirely blind to those facts and factors which are absorbing the chief attention of his elders.

The guests of a summer hotel were one evening entertained with recitations by an expert of the platform. The children on the front row exhibited varying degrees of interest, rising at times to extreme demonstrations of delight. Subsequently I found that the poem which drew from them the loudest plaudits was not only beyond their comprehension, but was entirely beyond their recall, while that which excited and absorbed them less was remembered. In the first case the only thing on their plane was the dramatic display of personal action, while the latter touched them at a point of contact with their own life interests.

Once more: A speaker having been invited to make an address, and not supposing children would be in the audience before him, had designed to give to parents some advice about the misjudging of their children. He went prepared to give numerous incidents illustrating the injustice of parental treatment. But before him sat many little children! It would not do to have them hear him arraign

their parents. He therefore moved on two distinct planes of motive,—one for the children, one for the adults. The former roared with laughter at his characterizations of the little folks in difficulty; the latter were more seriously drawing the inferences which came to them, more or less, as self-accusations. On interrogating certain of the children some time after, it was evident that they had not seen the real point of the address, for its implications had been out of their plane, while the adults gave overt evidence of their appreciation of the real motive of the speaker.

These illustrations ought to show clearly that children of the primary class may have Scripture lessons brought before them, the treatment of which entertains and makes them seem to be taking in the whole historical and spiritual situation, while, in fact, they and the teacher are all the time viewing the demonstration upon planes quite remote from each other.

The child's plane of life is one of simples and of concretes, one of directness and im-

mediateness; one of activity, not of reflection; one of external appreciations, not of introspections. Any attempt to force upon him the complex, the abstract, the circuitous, the remote, the introspective, will be sure to end unhappily

III

APPLYING THE PRINCIPLE

III

APPLYING THE PRINCIPLE

Although the general principle of appealing to the youthful mind through the already familiar fact in interested experience has been freely illustrated in the foregoing chapter, it may be helpful to show more specifically just how the principle can be applied in practice with persons of all ages, and of various conditions and interests.

It is not always possible, in dealing either with an individual or with aggregations, to strike the point of closest contact with life or with the most familiar interests or activities, but it is possible to address children on the general plane of child sight. Notwithstanding the stress that has, in the foregoing pages been laid upon things or external objects of sense perception, it is possible to find the point of contact through, if not in, mere men-

tal habit or bodily function. Thus a child may be reached through mirth, or hunger, or through his curiosity or his spirit of investigation. Yet this is not to say that the child's thought must be turned back upon these mental states or inward feelings as objects. We can laugh with a laughing child and admire with an admiring child, but, after all, back of these emotional states lie the things of sense which awaken them. But all this will always have to be within the child-life plane. In "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," the line "How I wonder what you are," represents in the adult a very different mental attitude toward the twinkling star from what it represents in the child. Speaking of nature study Superintendent Balliet says children "are not interested in the scientific distinctions of root, stem, leaves, and flowers—plants must be instinct with human attributes; they do not care about the structure of the teeth, the claws, the eyes of the cat and the dog,—the cat and the dog must appeal to them as friends and companions; they do not

care for the bear and the fox of natural history, it is the bear and the fox of the fairy tale and the fable, endowed with human attributes, that touch their emotions and arouse their deepest interest."

Again, a "golden text," such as some of those which have already been cited, would not be likely to arouse the curiosity or tempt the inquiring spirit, while a little bit of nature or manufacture would at once incite inquiry and hold attention.

Take an instance: I was once called, as a substitute, to teach a class of very frisky boys of perhaps nine to eleven years of age. The lesson was on the Golden Rule. The boys were in a state of ceaseless activity and mischief-making. It was plain that they would be utterly beyond my control if I persisted either in mere Scripture readings or with ethical abstractions. In less time than it takes to tell it, I said to myself, "Get your point of contact; address them through their senses; get on to the plane of boys' interests." I immediately drew an ivory foot-rule out of

my pocket and asked what it was. Silence and attention were immediate. Some called it a "ruler," some a "measure," and one finally said it was a "rule." This experiential knowledge of standards, curiosity, and investigating spirit, at once became my allies. I had a threefold point of contact. It is not essential that every boy should be a carpenter's son or draughtsman in a case like this. The point of contact is in reality not so much with a material object as with the sort of thing —a standard of measurement, for instance —that easily occupies a boy's mind. If the object is a thing of common personal experience with him, so much the better.

My next inquiry was to ascertain what it was made of. Some said ivory, some said bone. The class was in full control. It was easy then to lead them on to an imaginary rule, through keeping them in a certain suspense of meaning, until we had reached the Golden Rule. Questioning then drew from them the relative value of ivory and gold, and of rules made from them—real or

figurative. It is unnecessary to follow the process more in detail, but the class was conquered, for that day at least, and their disgraceful hubbub was turned into an exemplary discussion of eternal truth.

Golden texts, theological doctrines, ethical abstractions from Catechisms or the Epistles, taken in themselves, would have been hurled at these bright minds in vain; but the contact with a single tangible object such as a boy would use, or, at all events, enjoys handling, was the successful point of departure for his spiritual instruction. Observe also that the lesson *developed* naturally from the material to the moral rule.

Take another case: A visitor was called on to address a school made up largely of children more or less familiar with country life, and of various ages. The lesson of the day had been on the entry of the Israelites into the promised land. He wanted to give the school, in less than ten minutes, a general grasp of the history of the Hebrews around the full circuit from the promise to Abraham

to the realization of the promise, centuries later. The details of many Bible lessons necessarily must have obstructed the broader view or general trend of the history. He must proceed upon the plan of a circuit or circularity. From what point in ordinary life could they be led into the conception of circularity, and the circuit from Canaan through Egypt and the Wilderness back into Canaan?

The first interest was awakened by drawing out, through questioning, their knowledge of the oak and the acorn, and, again, by the complete circuit made by a drop of water from ocean to cloud, to rain, to spring, to river, and to sea again. From contact with this object illustration of the idea of circularity it was easy to lead the school on to the circuit that covered centuries in the life of the Hebrews. This was successfully accomplished in eight minutes. But it must be noted that the lesson here does not *develop* as naturally out of the starting-point as in the preceding case. The point of contact was more in the nature of a catch at attention by

artifice and was, therefore, in a measure, faulty. Pedagogically this is of much less value than a point of contact from which the essential teaching is not a parallelism, but an organic, unfolding unity. But this was not a grade class and one may resort to such artificial processes—mere parallels or illustrations—with heterogeneous assemblages, even though it cannot be regarded as a very promising pedagogical process.

Another illustration I extract from a remarkably graphic and suggestive article by Elizabeth Harrison in The Sunday-School Times. It shows also that the application of the principle is not limited to little children.

A kindergartner, visiting a mission school, was asked by the superintendent to take a class of "toughs" which had already been given up in despair by four teachers. The threat of the superintendent to eject them from the room if they did not behave was received with derisive laughter. This was followed, during the opening exercises, by various outrageous antics, and then came the

time for the lesson teaching. Miss Harrison continues:

As soon as they were settled, one boy raised his blacking box, which up to this time had been hidden under his chair; with a flourish almost too quick to be seen, he scraped it across the nose of another boy. This was an affront not to be tolerated. Instantly, the insulted boy raised his clenched fist. In a moment more the blow would have descended, and the usual street row would have taken place in the Sunday school room.

This was our kindergartner's opportunity. "From the Known to the Unknown" had been her motto for years. Through curiosity, reverence was to be awakened. Quick as a flash, she reached out her hand, and seizing the blacking box exclaimed, in a tone of animation: "I can tell you something about this box that you do not know."

The boys were amazed, as they expected a reprimand. The clenched fists slowly descended; all eyes were fastened upon her.

"Bah!" said one of the boys, in a tone of contempt; "you're trying to guy us now."

"Indeed, I am not," replied the kindergartner. "I know something very wonderful about this box, and I do not believe any of you ever heard it."

"Give us a rest!" tauntingly said another skeptic. But all the others cried out: "What it is? Go ahead!"

"Of what is this box made?" said the teacher, in a slow and mysterious tone of voice.

"Wood, of course," said two or three of the disappointed group, the look of contempt returning to their faces.

"Oh, yes! of course," responded the teacher; "but where did the wood come from?"

"Out of the carpenter-shop," again answered two or three.

"But where did the carpenter get it?" said the kindergartner, still keeping up her tone of mystery.

"From the lumber yard," answered one boy, more knowing than the rest.

"Yes," said the teacher, encouragingly; "but where did the lumber-yard man get it?"

This brought the wisest among them to the end of his knowledge.

She then began, and described to them the long, slow growth, through centuries of time, of the forest trees. The long, long years of silent waiting, until the ax of the woodman did his work; the busy, picturesque life of the logging camp; the dangerous voyage of the logs, tied together in a raft, as they floated down the majestic river; the wonderful invention by which machinery was made to transform these round logs into flat boards ready for the lumber-yard.

The boys listened in intense interest. When she had finished, there was a deep-drawn sigh, and all eyes turned instinctively to the blacking-box, the mystery of whose former life had been unfolded to them.

The teacher saw that she had gained a point. Reverence must come from idle curiosity. Curiosity had been

gradually transformed into interest already. She continued:

"I think I know something else about this box which you do not know."

She then drew out their knowledge about the nails that held it together, tracing the process of their manufacture back to the solitary bits of iron ore in the mountain range, so old that the life of man had no record of their beginning. She graphically pictured the life of a miner. By this time every boy was leaning forward in breathless interest, fascinated by the new world into which she had led him. Again taking up the box, she asked what color it was, and pursued the same method on that point.

Gradually the ringleader among the boys, leaning forward until his head reached far beyond his body, exclaimed in tones of deepest reverence:

"I know what you are. You're a fortune-teller; that's what you are!"

This was the highest tribute which he could pay her. In the back alley in which he lived, a mysterious fortune-teller played the part of Delphic oracle. To him she was the personification of wisdom. And there sat a

woman before him who apparently knew everything,—who could tell him of that great mysterious world which lay outside of his district.

She had gained her point. She had raised within each of them a feeling of reverence. . . . Slowly but surely she built up an altar in them to the unknown God, which altar was necessary before the God of righteousness and of mercy and of love could be preached unto them.

To come back more particularly to little children, the principle of the point of contact and the way of leading the child easily from this point in his experience to spiritual truth without leaving the natural level of a child's sight cannot be better illustrated than from Froebel's "Mother Play." [1]

[1] The reader is referred particularly to Susan E. Blow's translation of "The Mottoes and Commentaries of Friedrich Froebel's Mother Play," one of the volumes of Appleton's International Education Series. "The *Mutter- und Kose- lieder*," says H. Courthope Bowen, "were collected and composed and organized some fifty years ago for little German children—mainly those who were surrounded with country sights and sounds and occupations. A very small amount of consideration will show, that for little English or American children—

especially when they live in cities—something different will be required if a similar effect is to be produced. We shall require what is English, or American, or what has become such. For the rest, we must draw upon the children's homes, and upon the actual life by which they are surrounded."

From so simple a point in the child's activities as the pat-a-cake play Froebel carries the little learner along step by step thus: "The bread, or, better still, the little cake which the child likes so much, he receives from his mother; the mother, in turn, receives it from the baker. So far so good. We have found two links in the great chain of life and service. Let us beware, however, of making the child feel that these links complete the chain. The baker can bake no cake if the miller grinds no meal; the miller can grind no meal if the farmer brings him no grain; the farmer can bring no grain if his field yields no crop; the field can yield no crop if the forces of nature fail to work together to produce it; the forces of nature could not conspire together were it not for

the all-wise and beneficent Power who incites and guides them to their predetermined ends."

Observe how different is this process from the common one of forcing the child on to an adult plane through the abstractions of theology, or systems of adult thought.

Again, note the suggestion in the play of "The Two Gates:" "The idea suggested in the farmyard gate is that the child should be taught to prize and protect what he has acquired. The thought illustrated in the garden gate is that he should be led to recognize and name the different objects in his environment. In your attempt to carry out the latter idea, be careful to begin with the things which the child sees around him in the house, the yard, the garden, and the meadow. From these advance to the naming of objects in the pasture and the wood. Teach your child not only to recognize and name objects, but also to recognize and name qualities."

H. Courthope Bowen notes that "actual life and actual nature around them—or which

can be placed close to them, are the Froebelian means of education. Because the *Charcoal-Burner* is more picturesque, more romantic, than *The Cabman*, that does not make him more, it makes him less effective for our purpose. It is with cabmen, not charcoal-burners, that so many little city children have to do. What Froebel bids us is to make the life and doings of the cabman interesting—yes, and even beautiful in their way—for the little ones who come in contact with them; and so of all the physical world that comes within touch of the children; till the very stones of the dingy pavement become wonderful, full of suggestion, part of the golden chain that links the world to God." Bowen elsewhere notes that "for those little city children we should not tell of *The Fish in the Brook* but of *The Sparrow in the Street*; not of *The Nest* with its birdlings, but of *The Cat and her Kittens*; not of *The Charcoal-Burner*, but of *The Costermonger*, *The Cabman*, *The Newspaper Boy*, *The Watercress Woman*; not of *The Wolf and the Boar*, but of *The*

Dog; and even instead of playing at "mowing the grass" it would be better for those little children to play at "sweeping the room."

The weather-vane is another familiar object in the child's life. Froebel here admirably illustrates the difference between conducting the child always on the plane of his own natural powers or appreciations, and confusing him by thrusting him out of it. "I might as well talk to you in a foreign tongue as to tell you that 'the pressure of air, or its altered density, or a change in its temperature, causes wind'! You would not understand a single word of this explanation. But one thing you can understand even now: A single mighty power like the wind can do many things great and small. You see the things it does, though you cannot see the wind itself. There are many things, my child, which we can be sure of though we cannot see them."

Enough has been said to demonstrate the very important double principle of beginning at the point of contact with experience and

of reaching high spiritual truths by keeping always upon the child's plane or level of life.

In aiming for new truth, and especially spiritual truth, however, we must allow the child, or man, to make the final reach through his own self-activity. He never can know anything unless he has himself worked it into his own life. One great fault of our primary religious instruction is that it is too clogged with process, or method. Our Lord usually left it to the people to work out his sudden transitions from the physical to the spiritual —from water to the water of life, from bodily to spiritual healing, etc. Sometimes his transition truth lay in a double meaning, as in "the wind bloweth [spirit breatheth] where it listeth." This is quite too occult for a child, but it illustrates our Lord's knowledge of the necessity of allowing the pupil's mind to perform its part in gaining that knowledge which is power. Our moral tags, or applications, are the ruin of many of our Bible and other stories for children.

The Salvation Army seeks and finds the de-

graded wretches of the slums, and others, not through a map of Palestine, nor through the Catechism, but through that which is common to their experience,—noise and racket, the bass drum and the brass horn. The loud music and the bright colors are the "lines of least resistance" over which this species of human nature passes into the first contemplation of a cleaner, better, and nobler life. Similarly, a child is to be introduced to his studies at the point of experience,—to geography by starting at his sense perceptions of distance, direction, form, number, rain, snow, clouds, steam, vapor, heat, cold, etc.; then locations at home and vicinity, the yard, garden, farm, or landscape in view, etc.

A live teacher in the South wrote to me, "My mother most interestingly taught me botany from the 'point of contact' of the yellow pollen on my nose when I had smelled a fragrant flower too ardently."

In response to the author's first publication on this subject of the point of contact, a teacher in the Southwest, Mr. James Newton

Baskett, wrote: "You are eminently right about your Sunday-school methods. It is God's way. Jesus went to the people at their point of contact, and, though a carpenter, he never drew a figure from his own calling, but always from theirs." He then goes on to give his experience in feeling for a point of contact from which to start an interest in ornithology in a country boy. He says:

"Recently I attempted to describe the oven-bird to a country boy who, I knew, had often seen it, but did not know it. I went through plumage, size, song, nest, etc., but the case looked hopeless. At last I mentioned the habit of alighting near the limb and running out toward its tip. His face brightened. 'Is he a kind of high stepper?' he asked, picking up his feet exactly as the bird does. In this way the boy has become a helpful observer—learning how to observe. His descriptions are so accurate that I often diagnose birds from them before he is through. He has a new interest in his farm work. He

could never have got it from systematic ornithology." No more can the child get his interest in religious truth through systematic theology, catechisms, or other adult forms of conventionalized and abstract thought, or images based on material things with which the child has never come into sense contact. Knowledge is power. Power and knowledge alike are the sign of life. Only from life can life come. Out of the concrete experience the child abstracts a general truth or principle, and then out of this abstraction of his own making comes again his concrete, outward deed.

A little girl once asked me about the bones in her arm. I briefly explained, but the off-hand explanation was not likely to remain with her. Soon after came a day when I carved a chicken for dinner. Giving her a wing, I said, "You see this part has one bone and this part two. It is like our arms." I subsequently showed her a human skeleton. The next time she was given a chicken wing at dinner, I said, "You know there are two

bones here, as in our forearms. Chickens' wings take the place of our arms." "Or," she responded, "wouldn't the chickens say, if they could talk about us, 'Their arms take the place of our wings'?"

Suppose I had answered, "Ah, my child, we must begin at the beginning! Anatomy is 'that branch of morphology which treats of the structure of organisms.' There are various divisions of the subject, as comparative anatomy, pathological anatomy, practical, surgical, topographical, transcendental anatomies, etc. Let us take nature in an orderly way. You must first commit to memory the definition of anatomy and the technology of the bones themselves. In after years it will serve you when you come to study the arm of man and the wing of bird."

Is this a travesty? Call it rather a parallel. Has it not been practically the procedure in many Sunday and day schools? No, our starting-point is not a logical definition or historical beginning, but a point in the pupil's

experience. In commenting on the course in physical geography in Pestalozzi's school Froebel says, "Particularly unpleasant to me was the commencement of the course which began with an account of the bottom of the sea, although the pupils could have no conception of their own as to its nature or dimensions."

As has been intimated, this principle is not peculiar to childhood but is, in a degree, universal. The previous chapter quotes Mr. Robertson's observation on the necessity of reaching the wild African on the plane of his experience. How would our principle be applied in Central Africa? In response to my request Mr. Robertson wrote an article for The Sunday School Times on "The Use of Native Tradition and Superstition in Bible Teaching among Africans." He says:

"How best to bring the Bible teachings to bear upon the understanding and conscience of the uncivilized and uneducated native, is a question with which one is constantly confronted in his work in Central Africa. With him there is none of the 'hereditary knowledge' of the

Bible, which is so useful in dealing with even the most degraded in Christian lands. Neither is there Christian sentiment nor example to help him.

"The theme of the Bible is so far out of the ordinary course of his thoughts, and its language, even in our best translations, so foreign to his ear, that it is with difficulty his interest can be aroused. Add to these the difficulty of teaching him by analogy, and his inability to generalize or analyze his conclusions, and one has some idea of what a missionary has to overcome in simply placing the gospel message before his congregation.

"With a good knowledge of the language, and the confidence of the people, the observant may find a story of native tradition and superstitious ceremony firmly implanted in the native mind, of which he can make use, as did Paul at Athens (Acts xvii. 22, 23), to illustrate and enforce his message.

"Reference to such a native story at once secures the attention, and constitutes a common ground of sympathy between speaker and audience. And it *is* a common ground, for God created all men 'in his own image,' and left upon the consciences of all some 'witness' of himself."

The native African may thus be touched at a point in his experience—his thought, feeling, and devotional attitude, which is an experience in common with him and his

Christian teacher. This is his spiritual gate of entry to the Kingdom of Christ. No one illustrated this principle of the point of contact in experience better than Paul when he began his sermon with the unknown God as his text.

The Rev. Mr. Poole, agent of the Christian League, among the Chinese in Philadelphia, says that these Chinamen are reached through their desire to learn to read. He remarks that if he should begin by telling them not to worship idols, they would turn away. Idols are indeed on the plane of their interests, but a point of contact must be handled by the teacher sympathetically, and not aggressively or inimically. "Every Chinaman that has been reached in Chinatown," says Mr. Poole, "has been reached through the spelling-book. By the time they get confidence in us they reach a point in the primer that says 'God loves all,' 'God loves me,' etc."

It is said that when the new queen of Madagascar saw that the missionaries were

making headway with the people she ordered them out of her kingdom. They remonstrated by saying that they were only teaching Greek and Hebrew with some other branches of knowledge. The queen, relenting, said she wanted her people taught something useful. If they could teach them to make soap there would be some excuse for their presence. The missionaries sent the queen a bar of soap and gained her favor. Soap was the material point of contact—the centre of native interest from which Christianity was to be developed. Here is a new application of the proverb "Cleanliness is next to godliness"!

A writer in Congregational Work says:

"Recently a colporteur in Korea gathered some people about him, but before he could tell them anything about the good books which he carried, and which he wished them to buy and read, they had to feel of him and handle his hat and his clothes. In some places a missionary has been asked to take off his shoes and stockings, that the people may see whether he really has feet and toes like themselves. Once a missionary in China, after he had preached to a company which seemed to be listen-

ing intently, asked if any of those present would like to make any inquiries that they might know more about what he had been saying, to which one of the company said immediately, 'We would like to know what those two buttons on the back of your coat are for.'"

No point of contact with superstitious, ignorant, and especially Oriental people is more effective than that on the plane of healing; hence the advantage of the medical missionary. Dr. W. J. Wanless, of the American Presbyterian Mission in India, writing in The Sunday School Times, says:

"The medical missionary as a follower of Christ has an immense advantage in his ability to disarm prejudice, and prepare the way for the preaching and reception of the gospel message. Christ's healing miracles attracted the multitudes, and, because of them 'the common people heard him gladly.' The same attention is gained by medical missionaries in every mission land to-day. Thousands flock for bodily treatment, and they hear of Him who alone heals the soul. In no station of our western India mission has it been so easy to obtain property and secure the good-will of the people and state, and enjoy the opportunity of preaching to all classes, as in Miraj, the centre of the mission's medical work.

"More than three hundred different villages are annu-

ally represented in the patients of all castes who seek relief in the Miraj dispensary and hospital. And all willingly hear the gospel,—hundreds for the first time, and thousands repeatedly. In the hospital for weeks together many listen to the daily explanation of the Scriptures. Numbers of these people come hundreds of miles for treatment. The majority come from villages beyond a fifteen-mile radius of Miraj. During their residence in the hospital, or while attending the dispensary, the patients often learn more by what they see than by what they are verbally taught. The teaching is 'illustrated.' Gospel deeds, the fruit of gospel commands, are acted in their presence. These things, so foreign to their own religious systems, are matters of amazement to them. . . .

"In view of the foregoing, it is not surprising that, in their ignorance, they regard us with worshipful reverence. It is, indeed, a matter of almost daily occurrence, that we have to check them in the very act of worshiping us. Entering the hospital, one hears from a new comer, 'Here comes our god,' 'He is the great God,' 'Where is there a god like him?' 'Sahib, you are our god,' etc. The other day, on entering the ward, a patient whose leg we had amputated called me to his bedside, and said, 'Sahib, put your feet on my bed.' 'And for what?' I asked, surprised. 'I want to worship them,' he replied. Such occasions always furnish us with a text on which to speak against idolatry, the sin so common to them,—the sin of giving God's glory to man."

The real point of contact is here indicated to be in the idea of a common humanity. These natives could hardly understand how anything so different could really be one of their kind with only a little surface variation. This was their interest—an experience in their narrow lives. And what better starting-point for teaching Christianity than human brotherhood?

Dr. George Matheson, in his "Studies of the Portrait of Christ," emphasizing the fact that it is because men are so much alike that they notice their differences, speaks suggestive hints for us at this point. There is a common plane, for instance, on which the disciples of Confucius and of Jesus can meet and understand each other. Confucius, like Jesus, values commonplace duties and the power to do little things. But the reason why he values them is not the reason why Jesus values them. Confucius wants men to be worldly and to show the proof of earthly intelligence; Jesus wants them to be unworldly and to show the proof of heavenly intelligence.

Again, there are likenesses between Buddha and Christ. Both demand an emptying of self; both select poverty, privation, and toil. From this common plane of likeness, or point of contact, between the followers of Jesus and of Buddha, the Buddhist is to be led to the essential difference between the two classes of disciples. The cross to Buddha means submission to human misery; to Jesus it is a protest against such misery. Buddha wants men to bow the knee to their own nothingness; Jesus wants them to lift the burdens that humiliate mankind. Jesus would not teach submission to pain, but resistance to it.

Once more, Zoroaster is at one with Jesus in calling on men to recognize the struggle with evil; the earth is a battlefield between powers of earth and those of heaven. From this common plane, or point of contact, the Zoroastrian is to be led away from Zoroaster's call to put on the warlike spirit to Jesus' call to put on the spirit of peace. The power that overcomes the world with Jesus is peace and mental calm.

Finally, Dr. Matheson cites the Stoics. There is much in common here with the teachings of Jesus also. Epictetus stands upon the sea because he has conquered his passions; Jesus stands upon the sea by reason of a great passion of love—what we call the Lord's passion. Epictetus has reached fortitude by restraining the vital stream; Jesus has reached fortitude by enlarging the vital stream. Epictetus has won by suppressing emotion; Jesus has won by the emotion of a wider interest. . . . The one has crucified the sense of danger; the other has eclipsed it by the sense of a greater danger. The one has conquered by the contraction, the other by the expansion, of the heart."

These are suggestive illustrations of the way in which the modern missionary is to apply the principle of the point of contact at the plane of experience and of leading therefrom to the hitherto unknown Christian truth. There is always a possibility of establishing contact at the point of likeness, sympathy, and common interest, between men and men

in all parts of the globe, and we have thus seen how the principle works in the case of African, North American Indian, Confucian, Zoroastrian, Buddhist, etc.

The applications of the principle may be extended in other directions. For instance, how can it be applied in music teaching? Here is a real case: A music teacher having a young boy for a pupil was much discouraged by his indifference and utter lack of interest in his task. On questioning him she found that he regarded piano playing as something for girls and not for boys to do. Having the natural teaching instinct she saw that the boy, who was thus suffering from the delusion that he was engaged in an effeminate business, must be reached through his interests as a *boy* —through boy life. So she tactfully played the few notes of an army bugle-call on the piano, and asked him whether he knew what that was. She explained its meaning as military language and immediately had a hold on him. Nor did she stop there, for she bought a book of bugle-calls and used them as exer-

cises. The boy became intensely interested as each call brought up a mental picture of army life. Music and the piano were no longer a feminine pastime. The boy was won through his masculine interests.

Many a parent is puzzled to know how to interest the children in good reading. An article on this subject by Antoinette Bryant Hervey, in The Chautauquan (January, 1900), contains some excellent illustrations of our principle. She says:

"To develop a love of good reading, we must not only set an example, and begin early, but we must enter so sympathetically into youthful tastes and standards that we can start from the child's actual interest rather than from what we think he ought to be interested in. Some little boys in a New York school, at the age when the collecting instinct is strong, formed a unique club for collecting the dirty stubs of street-car tickets which the conductors throw on the ground. One boy's mother forbade it at once, with the result that he collected on the sly, and hid the stubs in the basement. Another mother, equally disgusted with the dirty stubs which filled her son's desk, and with the way he went along the street with eyes for nothing but stubs, took an entirely different course. She started from stubs, a worthless interest,

and led him off into stamps, a useful interest. First, by suggesting that transfers were much more interesting than stubs, she led him to study the transfers and their meaning, till he could tell every cross-town line from 125th Street to the Battery, and became absorbingly interested in the geography of New York. Upon the transfer interest it was easy to graft the postage-stamp interest, from which in turn sprang a whole bunch of interests, geographical, historical, ethnological.

"Another problem in interest grafting is presented by the mother of a boy of twelve, who, she says, 'cares for nothing but horses. He will not read, or listen to reading.' According to the principle of 'grafting,' the solution is simply to begin with some book about horses. Even so badly written a story as 'Black Beauty' may serve as a stepping-stone. Then perhaps Kipling's story —'The Maltese Cat'—of the horses who really played the polo game, and that other horse story in 'The Day's Work,' 'A Walking Delegate.' Then 'The Bell of Atri,' by Longfellow, and the story of Pegasus, in Hawthorne's 'Wonder Book.' By that time, and even much earlier, the boy will easily be led to books of exploration, and books about strange people, and then, before you know it, your boy is interested in history."

Thus far we have considered more particularly the individual interest, but the principle can be and often is applied to the public mind. When Froebel was in need of funds

to establish his institution at Blankenburg in 1840, he took advantage of the four-hundredth anniversary of printing to advertise and secure attention to his scheme. In his reminiscences, Dr. H. Clay Trumbull relates how Thomas K. Beecher, being asked to speak, in Hartford, on the Devil, made his point of contact with the public mind through the popular excitement over spiritualism which was then centred at Hartford. Similarly, times of thanksgiving, of calamity, of national emotion of any kind, furnish states or planes of experience through which the public is often to be most successfully appealed to in any appropriate interest or cause.

IV

MISSING THE POINT

IV

MISSING THE POINT

THERE are those who have a certain intuitive sense that the point of interest to a child and the point of departure, or starting, in his instruction, should be something which to them seems childish and simple. Consequently they often succeed in gaining entry to the child mind. But, having no formulated guiding principle, they also often fail.

To illustrate: I remember once hearing an address to children based upon the text, "The little foxes that spoil the vines." These little foxes were our small vices or weaknesses. Why did the speaker choose such a point of departure? I suppose "the little foxes" had a simple, childlike sound about it to him, and seemed as though it would be easily a point of interest to little

children. Perhaps it was, in so far as it roused their curiosity. Whatever the children got out of the address, they got in spite of, rather than because of, the point of departure, which was not a point of contact with common experience. To very few children does a fox exist in more than name, if that; and the propensity of foxes for spoiling vines is one which they could not appreciate unless they had lived in a country where they had actually seen this kind of destruction wrought, or heard it talked about until it became a familiar fact.

In the same way, writers for children often seem to suppose that they are placing themselves on the child's plane by the use of certain kinds of youthful expressions and by a kind of forced intimacy of manner, while the situations, the motives and raw material out of which the story or article is made, are foreign to the child's perception, thought, or feeling.

Certain "appliances" frequently used in the primary school as a part of the process of "adapting" the lesson matter sometimes

fail because, forming no links with the child's own experience, they merely centre the interest on themselves as objects.

Miss Julia E. Peck well says: "In our attempts to meet the child on his own level we have fallen very far below his level, failing to note from week to week that the dignity of his simplicity is a lasting rebuke to our fussy sentimentality."

Again, history as such is a concept practically out of the primary child's power of acquirement. He has too few years behind him in his own experience, and has had too little dealing with that impersonal thing—organized society. History as personal biography, Bible stories as such, have a very large educational function for the little child, but not as history. No matter what delight the children show in paraphernalia, no matter what pat answers they give, we must be suspicious of the delight and the answers, and we must look for another cause than historical consciousness.

An illustration is to be found in the follow-

ing, which was sent to me by an experienced secular as well as Sunday-school teacher. She says: "I shall not soon forget my own struggles with the International lessons. I had small boys from six to eight years old. The lesson was Nehemiah's prayer. I had tried very hard to make the lesson practical, and entertaining as well, but I am afraid I must have succeeded too well, for when I asked one small boy how many years ago he thought all these things had happened, he opened his eyes very wide, and ventured, 'I guess about a week.' I think he thought that he had been rash in suggesting such a remote period." We remember certain events of our childhood only as incidents in that life. They seldom have any historicity about them. Their chronological order we are seldom conscious of unless we have worked it out in later life by reasoning upon it.

A young lady tells me that she remembers the terrible attacks of earache she used to suffer from when a child. But her mother says she never had more than one attack!

A writer in the London Academy thus shows how completely "Gray's Elegy" is remote from the schoolboy's plane of experience. He says:

"To carry boys over the Pons Asinorum is child's play compared with making them understand the 'Elegy.' I remember how I used to grind through it without one word of explanation when I was a little fellow of ten years of age [observe, ten!]: each line went by itself, and one consequence was that the thing in the piece that impressed me most was the reference to

> The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear.

I had had my neck nearly wrung off in those days for once saying that a noun 'governed' something, and I was not the boy to risk further twisting by asking if it was the polar bear that was meant; but there was a magnificent remoteness in the dwelling of this creature that always pleased me, and it was not till later that I discovered what the verse really meant.

"Yet the real case against the 'Elegy' has still to be stated. It is not the presence of isolated, difficult lines which makes Gray's poem the most unsuitable in the language to put before boys. It is the whole mind of the 'Elegy,' which is a concentrated account of a mood impossible to the young. The poem touches a boy nowhere. It gives him no cue; there is no beckoning familiar thing to hearten and invite. . . . What root

has it in boyhood? What boy ever believed in the 'hoary-headed swain' or the 'forefathers of the hamlet'? As for the youth who gave to Misery all he had, a tear, and gained from Heaven, 'twas all he wish'd, a friend, no schoolboy ever understood that transaction."

The effort to force a child on to a plane not his own is thus condemned in an editorial utterance of The School Journal.

"The mistake is frequently made of assigning subjects for compositions that lie outside of the pupil's range of experience and vision. A premium is thereby put upon shallowness in thought and superficiality of judgment. It is a way of making the children hypocrites by having them talk or write of things they know nothing about. Every great educator from Comenius down to our day has raised his voice against what Basedow terms 'pernicious word culture.'"

Girls just in their teens are sometimes required to write compositions on society or other topics upon which school children should have no opportunity of forming an opinion. The Baroness Buelow quotes Froebel as saying, "The instruction forced upon the child's mind which does not correspond to its inner stage of development and its measure of

power, robs him of his own original view of things, and, with it, of his greatest power and capacity to impress the stamp of his own individuality upon his being. Hence arises a departure from nature which leads to caricature."

Referring also to what was quoted in the previous chapter on the differing environments and experiences of the city and the country child, it is well to ask how far the Twenty-third Psalm is fairly adapted to a city child of six who has never seen a flock of sheep, much less an Eastern shepherd! Apropos of this the distinguished Orientalist, Canon Tristram, says:

"If the abundant imagery of Scripture, taken from pastoral life, contains so many allusions foreign to what we see in the tending of flocks in our own country, how much more difficult must these allusions be to those who know nothing of flocks, and never saw a sheep? I felt this last year, when, one Sunday in Ceylon, I was addressing, through an interpreter, a large congregation of native Christians, and unfortunately chose the subject of the good shepherd. My interpreter told me afterward that not one of my hearers had ever seen a sheep,

or knew what it was. 'How, then, did you explain what I said?' I asked. 'Oh!' he replied, 'I turned it into a buffalo that had lost its calf, and went into the jungle to find it.'"

This interpreter probably knew nothing of the science of teaching, and yet he had an instinctive sense of the principle of the point of contact on the plane of experience. Is there not a suggestion here for us?

Another way of frequently missing the point and so compelling children to express adult sentiments and feelings entirely foreign to the plane of child life is found in some of the hymns they are asked to sing. Mrs. George Archibald says:

"There is good sense, as well as fervent joy and full assurance, in the verse which says:

'Come, sing to me of heaven,
When I'm about to die;
Sing songs of holy ecstasy
To waft my soul on high.
There'll be no sorrow there,' etc.

But, as children are not, ordinarily, about to die, shall their spiritual songs be principally about heaven, and

expressive of an intense longing to go there? Yet, when we take pains to notice, we find in Sunday-school hymns a vast amount of rime, time, tune, and measure devoted to chanting the desolation of life, the longing for death, and a submissive waiting for release and glory. What could be more unnatural?

"The child's first effort is toward the continuance of its earthly existence. The mother's first care has the same object. The first warnings of the infant are those against dangers that might imperil its life,—the flame, the edge-tool, the flight of stairs. Its first work at school is as a foundation for the needs of the terrestrial sojourn. And its first spiritual teaching should be that of active goodness, and cheerful, kindly Christian endeavor in the sphere to which it is born.

"'The home of the soul' may often fitly be the goal of adult longing. But the first home of the soul is the natural body. Let the children learn to magnify the offices of this body. Let their songs be those which will inspire their souls to use the lips, the hands and feet, in the service of man, as the children of God."

Think of a primary school being taught to sing:

"Art thou weary, art thou languid,
Art thou sore distressed?
'Come to me,' saith one, 'and coming,
Be at rest.'

. . . . . .

"If I still hold closely to him,
What hath he at last?
'Sorrow vanquished, labor ended,
Jordan passed.'"

The child's plane may be spiritually quite as elevated as that of the adult, but the mode of the child's spiritual self-expression will be different.

There is another way of forcing an entrance to the child's mind at an unnatural and dangerous point. Doubters, agnostics, skeptics, or infidels, are not found in early childhood. When children inquire, they do it because they want to know more, not because they doubt. It is therefore a fatal mistake to address the child as if he were a skeptic.

A discerning student of the child, a primary worker, Miss Lida B. Robertson, says: "Jesus is 'the way, the truth, and the life,' and our teachings of him should be positive, and not negative. We do him and the pupils irremediable harm to fill their embryo minds with the accursed doubts of scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees, in order that we may try to prove the truth to them."

Even if a child has unfortunately been in an unbelieving environment, and so may be said to have had some experience with that phase of life, points of contact with it are not to be taken merely because they seem to touch his experience. Observe, this ruling is not arbitrary, but is based largely on the fact that unbelief is not on a plane natural to the condition of childhood. Skepticism, if it can be found in a little child, has been received through suggestion from without, and is therefore abnormal and premature. Any suggestion of unbelief is liable to beget unbelief. It is time enough to deal with it later, when it is begotten.

It remains now to show how the point of contact with child experience is often missed though the misuse of objects or "symbols" which do not symbolize. I quote at length from an address on this subject by Miss Anna W. Williams, the Superintendent of Public Kindergartens in Philadelphia. She says:

"The object or 'symbol,' as it is falsely called, as generally applied in Sunday-school, does not give a child

a clearer vision of truth, but rather leads him away from it. We confuse the application of symbol to the adult and the child's interpretation of it. Symbolism to the adult is the representation of spiritual truth by means of material things; to the child the symbol stands for an object. For instance, 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path,' referred to the custom of wearing lamps on the feet to prevent the bite of serpents, and to avoid other dangers. This illustration is meaningless to any human being, whether adult or child, who has not felt the guidance of God's word in a dark hour of life, and the need of such. A child must have the experience before he can interpret the symbol. Showing him a foot with a lamp on it does not give experience, which is the essential element of the story; it simply tells him the method of lighting the path in Oriental countries.

"Let me recapitulate. The idea must be gained through life experience, through feeling, before the symbol means anything. 'If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee.' No child could feel the meaning of this figure of speech, since he has had no life experience of gangrenous sickness and the corrupting power of sin. Children do not look beyond the immediate sin, while the adult does realize the mass of corrupting evil that grows from what we call 'minor sins,' such as speaking ill of one's neighbors, leading to greater sin, such as neglect of prayer.

"A child's use of symbolism is a totally different one He explains one *thing* by another *thing*. He makes a

chair (a thing) represent a train of cars (another thing), his father's cane a horse. He would never put the cane for something he did not understand. He makes one thing he understands represent another thing he understands. For instance, he would never of himself use the spiritual expression, 'My soul doth magnify the Lord' by the use of a magnifying glass in his hand, as has been done in illustrating a Sunday-school lesson. 'Magnify' —to make great, larger in size than a common glass can do—in no way expresses Mary's feeling of exaltation in the greatness and loving-kindness of God, and the honor given to her, as she expresses it in the Magnificat. . . .

"In a religious paper appeared sixty symbols used to illustrate texts of Scripture. I will quote some of them, and attempt to show clearly the false application.

"'A pretty lamp with no oil in it,' or 'an apple with a decayed heart,' for 'man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.' In the first place, the lamp is without all its powers. God does not make us without ability to give light; hence it is not a complete symbol, even to the adult mind.

"The apple with the fair outside and rotten centre is beyond a little child's thought in regard to people. He does not penetrate in this analytic way into others. We teach him, if we teach him anything, not to sit on a judgment-seat in regard to his neighbors. He thinks people mean what they say, are what they appear to be. Having a fair outside and a bad heart is not a part of his experience. The idea of the hypocrisy of the world does not belong to a young child's mind. Are we not

suggesting a bad motive to him before the good is firmly established? He learns that fact later in life from his own experience, and the learning of it does not make him a better man. . . . We must get the feeling of the love of God thoroughly impressed by presentation of his loving side before wandering from him will give an inward pang.

"'A suit of silver armor,' for 'Put on the whole armor of God.' One serious objection to this silver display is that the armor is so attractive that the child's attention is called from the thought to the thing, and held there. This figure, too, comes in Ephesians, which represents the high-water mark of Paul's experience, and requires the richest and fullest experience of Christian culture to apprehend the spiritual application. Let me repeat: the attractiveness of the object chains the child's attention to the thing rather than the thought, and we spend our whole lives in trying to spring away from things of sense to spiritual things. Such display materially defeats the purpose intended to be accomplished.

"'A paper pattern and scissors' for Christ our pattern is grossly materialistic. A story of one action of Christ's life, to inculcate the thought of the text, would be infinitely better. The child may understand the meaning of the word 'pattern' better by means of this concrete illustration, but surely not the word 'example,' for which it stands. How can a paper pattern represent holiness, spirituality, etc.? It associates a great and holy thing, too, with an external triviality of life, and sets more store by the word than the idea.

"Let us be careful that our Sunday-school does not drift into a system of object lessons that are materializing the child. If you show a red cardboard cross to-day, you must show a blue one on the succeeding Sunday, or some other more enticing object, if you are going to draw them by sense attraction.

"May it not be possible, with such methods as our Sunday-schools are adopting to-day, that when the child reaches maturity he may have a contempt, not for the teacher, but for her presentations of great truths, and, when the spiritual light dawns on him, his vision may be obscured by the materialistic view of his childhood?"

It is not merely the starting-points, then, that must be within the child's range of experience, but it is the whole teaching which proceeds step by step from it. This means not only that we must find the proper points of contact, but that the body of lesson material itself be appropriately selected for its simplicity, positivity, immediateness, concreteness, connectedness, and spiritual suggestiveness.

V

THE LESSON MATERIAL

V

THE LESSON MATERIAL

It is a much heralded idea among Sunday-school teachers that it makes little or no difference what the subject-matter of the Bible-study lesson is, provided the teacher "adapt" it to the children. It is contended that the selection of uniform lessons for pupils of all ages is quite consistent with the demand for graded instruction; and that the grading should be, not in the subject-matter, but in the method of its impartation.

We shall not here debate the question as to whether "experience" has proved this (as is claimed) or not. It is, indeed, rather a question of what the child's experience is with us, than ours with him, and the trend of evidences in the foregoing chapters must suffice. The issue which I make is, that choice of material is the first essential and the

method of presenting the material comes second. Child nature and individual interests are the real choosers.

Some Scripture passages are certainly better for some purposes than others. Now the little child is a very different sort of purpose from the man or woman or the youth. It is therefore quite reasonable to suppose that some Scripture lessons would be better than others for a child.

No teacher more carefully selected his material according to his pupils' plane of experience than our Lord. As has been shown, Jesus went to the people at their point of contact with life, and, though a carpenter, he never drew a figure from his own calling, but from theirs. In The Biblical World, Lincoln Owen well says:

"In all phases of intellectual education we recognize an intimate connection between thing, idea, and word; in more general terms, between reality, thought, and language. Word and language cannot have for the child appropriate meaning until he has the appropriate experience. Hence, it is a psychological necessity to start with the child's experiences; to make indefinite

and chaotic experiences definite and orderly; to supply pattern experiences; to connect his experiences with the appropriate language. The teacher may begin at either end of the series, but progress and clearness require that the entire series be mastered. Much indefinite and hazy work results from the wordiness of instruction. The constant problem in teaching children is to make language significant. In the Sunday-school there seems to be a necessity to start with the language end of the series, and much of the verbal instruction there fails to get associated with any experience, and is accordingly faulty."

But apart from this, if we recognize the right of each child to his individuality, we should recognize the right of childhood to its individuality. It seems almost humiliating to plead for a truth so well understood in every other sphere except that of Sunday-school instruction. Would any sensible parent consent to send his children to a secular primary school where there was no choice of lesson material, but where any and every subject, however abstruse and remote from the child's plane of thought, was ordered to be "adapted" by the teacher? Such "adaptation" as one often sees is a misnomer. It results in a

nominal instruction, but not real teaching of the essential truth involved in the assigned text.

If it be claimed that any and every text in the Bible is suitable for the children provided it be suitably "adapted" by the teacher, I let the words of Pestalozzi answer: "The reform needed is not that the school coach should be better horsed, but that it should be turned right around and started on a new track."

The turning around will be the adoption of material selected especially from the child's point of view, as well as the ordering of the services and the mode of address to the child upon his own plane of sense, thought, and feeling. In fact, this latter—feeling—is one of the neglected aims in early education. The filling of the child mind with "information" is a small service to humanity compared with the education of the feelings. The primary school that begets reverence alone has done a large work. Appreciation and affection must precede formal thought.

The needs, desires, purposes, pains, and pleasures of a horse, a cat, a fly, a flower, antedate in the child's heart the knowledge of their anatomy in the child's mind. It is better to lead a child to love a tree than to calculate the lumber in it. Professor Martin G. Brumbaugh, of Pennsylvania, suggestively says:

"John James Audubon had his boyhood home in a cave on the banks of the Perkiomen creek, in Montgomery County. It was here that his soul was filled with rapturous love for bird-life. It was this love that led him for a quarter of a century into the secret haunts of humming-bird and oriole. First an artist, then a scientist. It was self-directed research after his own plan, investigation prompted of love, that made possible the growth into the first ornithologist of America, perhaps of the world. And this is typical of the process in each life. It is a great moment in a boy's life when he first meets in the world of things the object for which his soul yearned—when he finds the things he loves and the things that link him lovingly to the great world without. A pupil of mine, dull and listless in his work for a year, was finally persuaded by his teacher to study botany. He did his text-book work in an indifferent and listless manner. Early in June, on a rainy afternoon, he accompanied his class to a private haunt of the

orchid family. Here the boy unexpectedly found a rare specimen, and, throwing himself upon the wet ground beside the beautiful flower, wept for joy, and, between his sobs, called alternately to his teacher and his God in his moment of supreme exaltation. That boy found the thing he loved. He loved all its associates, and became one of the best botanists Juniata College ever produced."

Perhaps some one urges that we do not bring the boys to Sunday-school to teach them to become botanists. No. But this boy was dull and listless as many a Sunday-school pupil is listless. The Bible is made to stand between him and life as this teacher's text-book stood between his pupil and life. Bible words, like all other words, must find their interpretation in experience. There must have been an experience in the child's life to interpret them and use them before they can be efficient in the child's spiritual education and life. Hence the need of a wise choice of the lesson material if we would have it educative instead of arrestive of development.

Miss Blow, speaking deprecatingly of the lack of clear insight in the choice of themes,

says: "It would seem that the selection of suitable themes is a matter of prime import." And a writer in The Westminster Review says: "What is true of bodily food is true also of spiritual food. Children's intellects cannot digest that which is suited to adults; and however sincerely religious beliefs may be held by parents, this does not prevent them from assuming a different complexion in the mind of a child. At second hand they are not merely useless, but pernicious." And Inspector Hughes of Toronto: "No greater wrong can be inflicted on a child than to try to make it exhibit the characteristics of the religious life of maturity either in profession or practice. The only certain product of such training is a hypocrite." And Froebel: "We should not forget that instruction should start from the pupil's own life and proceed from it like a bud or sprout."

Says Herbert Spencer: "Good exposition implies much constructive imagination. A prerequisite is the forming of true ideas of the mental states of those who are to be

taught; and a further prerequisite is the imagining of methods by which, beginning with conceptions which they possess, there may be built up in their minds the conceptions they do not possess. Of constructive imagination, as displayed in this sphere, men at large appear to be almost devoid; as witness the absurd systems of teaching which in past times, and in large measure at present, have stupefied, and still stupefy, children."

Says Louis Heilprin: "We teach a child to bound every state in the world, and make him learn all the capitals, before he has the slightest interest in land that he has not seen. We teach him to locate a long array of capes and promontories without his having any conception of their significance as landmarks. . . . We drag him from one corner to another of the great tableau of history, and compel him to take in its insignificant details before he has been given a chance to acquire any interest in any age but his own."

And Professor Jackman, in The School Journal, with great acuteness says:

"The child's pictures of a great flat, and perfectly motionless, earth, and of the sun, a relatively small burnished disk, daily traversing the sky, just out of reach of the birds, have all been so honestly earned that it seems almost wrong to undeceive him. As the subject is usually presented in the common schools, there is no excuse for the attempt that is made to disturb his early impressions. The teacher's first act is to smite him with the statement that the earth is round; then, in exchange for the pupil's earth—with all its flatness, still a world of bewildering beauty and intense interest—the teacher presents him with a six-inch pasteboard globe and bids him think on that. It is a barter which the soul of the pupil never sanctions, and the result is that although he ever after dutifully says: 'The earth is round like a globe or ball,' the picture of the dear old *flat* earth of his childhood forever remains as the *actual* basis of all his geographic thinking.

"The fact is, the pupil will never exchange his flat earth of *actual experience* for the pasteboard globe of the teacher's desk; nay, he will not trade it for the round earth itself until, *through an equally actual experience*, the latter gradually fills up as a great picture and lays hold of his imagination and his life as did the one of his early years. Whatever may be in the child's experience when he enters school, whether right or wrong, the teacher may rest assured that usually it has been acquired through honest growth; if education is to correct or expand this experience, it can be done only through processes of growth just as gradual and equally genuine.

"It is, therefore, a serious task for him who seeks to disrupt the child's experience by teaching him that the earth is round; that it is flying through space nearly nineteen miles every second. . . . Facts which actually subvert his whole experience by some means must be made to appear more reasonable than the very things which he has seen before his own eyes all his life."

So far as geographical and historical aspects go, the best general criticism is that we introduce them too early.

All this fairly pictures our tendency, in all dealings with the child, to keep him in the remote instead of the near, and in minor details to him disconnected and unrelated, instead of large simple generals or wholes, indigenous to his plane of experience.

It will not do to show the weakness and harmfulness of our present systems without indicating in what direction reform must lie. It is not my part or purpose to work out the details of a primary Bible course or program. Nor is it essential that every instructor, in order to be familiar with the principle of the point of contact and the plane of experience, should be expert in the construction of lesson

courses. But some basal suggestions, some foundation principles, may be here laid down for completeness' sake.

The Bible is a complex of abstracts and concretes, of history, biography, poetry, ethics, prophecy, law, doctrine, etc., embracing also many bloody and, to us, revolting historical pictures, altogether unsuitable for a child's reading. It is therefore, as a text-book, unique, and accordingly difficult of presentation. The result is that our instruction courses are likewise too full and complex. There is too much formal "teaching." Dr. W. T. Harris says: "It is believed that arrested development of the higher mental and moral faculties is caused in many cases by the school. The habit of teaching with too much thoroughness and too long-continued drill the semi-mechanical branches of study, such as arithmetic, spelling, the discrimination of colors, the observation of surface and solid forms, and even the distinctions of formal grammar, often

leaves the pupil fixed in lower stages of growth and unable to exercise the higher functions of thought." It will be urged that this does not apply to religious work as these branches are not taught in Sunday-schools. But a candid investigation of much of the drill of the Sunday-school will disclose an alarming aptness in Dr. Harris's words.

Beginning where we find the pupil, then, we must take a few near-at-hand points in the child's experience,—objects, or activities in the home, in nature, parental and filial relations, etc. These must be combined or thought into a simple, easily-conceived whole. Froebel, speaking of the family, says:

"This feeling of community, first uniting the child with mother, father, brothers, and sisters, and resting on a higher spiritual unity, to which later on is added the unmistakable discovery that father, mother, brothers, sisters, human beings in general, feel and know themselves to be in community and unity with a higher principle—with humanity, with God—this feeling of community is the very first germ of all true religious spirit, of all genuine yearning for unhindered unification with the eternal, with God."

But what of children of depraved and cruel parents? Manifestly home is not the starting-point for such a child's reach to a Heavenly Father. But somewhere the child will have found a chum, a friend, a human helper, as a germ for the larger feeling toward the Divine Friend and Parent.

We must observe *peoples* before we talk about "a peculiar people," "the chosen people." "The simplest general whole," says Colonel Parker, is the "first objective point." And "the plain rule of procedure, in going from the part to the whole, is to form a real whole that can be most easily imagined or appreciated. . . . The anatomy of a finger or a muscle is more difficult than the anatomy of the entire framework of the body." A child understands sentences and phrases of which he does not understand the isolated words. He can swing his arms mightily, albeit he cannot control his fingers precisely.

Pursuing the germinal idea of dependent and affectionate personal relations we approach the idea of Creator and Father of

all. Next we might aim for the concept of communication through the simple percepts of speech, books, etc.; then a great simple, general whole again, a concept of prayer, or of revelation,—the Bible. The way is thus naturally and logically opened for the later revelation of God in human form,—the Word "made flesh." (All the steps that this paragraph implies cannot, of course, be detailed here. Nor is it meant to say that this is the only course, but rather that it is the only right principle of beginning and of proceeding,—from the known or, better, the already *felt* interest to the unknown.) But we must not go too fast in working out such a program. Repetition, constant and frequent, is essential. Here is where the present International lesson system fails sadly with young children, and indeed the same is true of most other systems of Bible lessons. It were better to use the same Bible story twelve times over than to have twelve stories with no repetition. The same story should be varied in mode at each telling, giving the

child the opportunity of discovery of the identity. Observe also that even this simple program is liable to be worked out too speedily into mere thought forms instead of addressing itself to the feelings. Appreciations and affections, attitudes of being instead of movements toward knowing, imaged ideals for willing—these are the goal.

Recalling again that young children have very little idea of time and space, we must consequently avoid much dependence upon interests rooted in them. It is useless to take children step by step from Egypt to the Promised Land until they have a comprehensive view, a simple idea of Israel (whether we call it "Israelites," "Hebrews," "Jews," "peculiar people," or any other name) from Abraham to the modern Jew. The complex of historical details within that view cannot be appreciated. "The fatal mistake," says Colonel Parker, "of many teachers . . . is that of leading pupils into the search for (to the teachers) alluring details, instead of teaching just enough of facts to subserve the pur-

poses of clear and simple generalizations." Creeping week by week from the Creation to Joshua or David or Zerubbabel is utterly futile if the intention is to be historical or chronological. Herbart observes that the impression of the present moment throws the one previously apprehended too quickly below the threshold of consciousness.

Moreover, the distracting details are a serious interference with the child's generalizing powers. There is no implication here that children do not feel great religious truths. But I mean to emphasize the difference between the simple and the complex, between the high and the intricate. Hawthorne saw that "children possess an unestimated sensibility to whatever is deep or high, in imagination or feeling, so long as it is simple likewise. It is only the artificial and the complex that bewilder them." Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler finely says that "the highest and most enduring knowledge is of the things of the spirit. That subtle sense of the beautiful and the sublime which accompanies

spiritual insight, and is part of it,—this is the highest achievement of which humanity is capable. It is typified, in various forms, in the verse of Dante, and the prose of Thomas à Kempis, in the Sistine Madonna of Raphael, and in Mozart's Requiem. To develop this sense in education is the task of art and literature, to interpret it is the work of philosophy, and to nourish it the function of religion." The child is born on the highway to this "highest achievement." Let us not block this way by a meddlesome multiplicity of words, words, words.

Again, we must have always in mind a simple idea of personal and loving relations, centring in the God-ward. Here the value of Bible stories is very positive. They lead pupils to put themselves in the place of others, and to look for causes and consequences. If they touch the child's experience, and arouse his curiosity, they educate memory, quicken desire, enforce moral, suggest standards, become a basis of action in the pursuit of ideals, and so develop character.

The stories must, however, be wisely selected, and, as already shown, they must be repeated. The continuous depicting of bloodshed and horrors in the illustrations given in certain Bible story-books for children, is simply barbarous. A child should not get as a dominant thought of God the idea of retribution, of killing, warring, etc. I know of a little child who was overheard telling a companion that she didn't believe "that story about the ark because she knew God would never drown people that way." Nor ought early impressions of God's Book to consist mainly of such things as are repellent to a sensitive nature, especially in its most impressible period. The child cannot have sufficient knowledge of situations and of sociological conditions to justify a repeated exhibit of vengeance and horror. For like reason the physical sufferings of our Lord on the cross must not be too minutely pictured, and his death ought seldom to be mentioned apart from his rising again. Then, too, the stories must have a certain simple completeness of

their own, and not be too dependent on remote causes and complications, or on peculiar local conditions.

The stories must have in them that which educates and stimulates right feeling, which forms ideals and leads to action. The story ought to do this itself—or, more accurately, the pupil, reacting to it, does it himself. In attempting to point a moral the teacher usually strangles the ideal at its birth in the child's soul. If a story needs much moralizing it were better not told at all. If the picture of a heroic deed touches a child's natural interest he feels the ideal born within him. "What a child has felt he never forgets; what he has merely been told he may not remember five minutes," says Alice W. Rollins. And Inspector Hughes observes, "The habit of 'pointing the moral' of tale or incident is a kindred error to the practice of forcing mature theories of religion or adult practices on the child." Miss Blow notes that the mind may be trusted to do its own universalizing. While it is true that no point of contact, or

starting-point, is likely to be equally serviceable for all members of a heterogeneous class alike, it is also true that the *moral* of a story will differ still more essentially for each one who hears it. Hence the impropriety of dictating the "application" to the class *en masse*. One lesson the primary teachers have yet to learn, and that is to let a good story do its own work. Better say too little than too much.

There can be no ideal program or course of lessons for all alike. Differences of condition among schools, and among the pupils in the same school, forbid it. The great variance in the qualifications of teachers, and the power of old associations, predilections, and prejudices, forbid it. And yet there is a sense in which there can be a course, ideal in its recognition of these difficulties, and in its concessions to them. At the very least the kindergarten basis of "an atmosphere of love" together with "training in good habits, such as order, obedience, punctuality, attention, industry"—as Eleanore Heerwart puts it—is

always in order. To this I may add the community sense which the kindergarten so effectually begets in the child. Yet the Sunday-school is not, and should not be called, a kindergarten, in any grade.

Recapitulating, we find that, in teaching the child, child nature is the first consideration; that the child is capable of feeling certain profound spiritual intimations, although he be incapable of receiving formal truths through a conventional adult phraseology; that we must take the child where we find him; that the mind feeds only upon that which it assimilates and grows only through its own self-activity; that we cannot force this assimilation beyond a more or less well-defined power of the child's nature; that we must proceed from experience-interests to an unknown; that from the concrete the pupil must do his own abstracting and proceed to his own concrete activity; that we must teach by wholes rather than in complications of detail; that the child mind has little power of perceiving matters of time or space, and

consequently can assimilate but little of history or geography; that the connection of one lesson with another must be a connection of thought and feeling rather than of mere chronology or artifice; that the narration of things painful and horrible must be as far as possible avoided; that Bible and other stories have an important pedagogical value, and that instruction must be positive rather than negative or apologetic. In short, *teaching is enabling another to restate the truth in terms of his own life.* If the pupil gives back only what we have given him he has got nothing. What he gives out in words or action must, sooner or later, be a re-statement of the truth in terms of his own self-activity. The teacher's test of his work therefore is not the test of a parrot but of a self-actively developing soul.

Any one who has attempted to build up a primary course in which the foregoing principles have been fairly respected, will have discovered that, if he can construct one such course, he can about as satisfactorily construct

more. He will have found himself, at times, in a strait betwixt two paths through Primary Land. He comes now and again to a parting of ways, both or all equally primary, equally promising, all trending toward the same goal. The resources are great and varied.

The truth is that life is the only real interpreter and educator. Our Sunday-schools like our day schools are too bookish—too much a thing apart from life relations, too little a thing of atmosphere and attitude and Christian endeavor. What Professor Dewey says of the secular school is not inapt here.

"From the standpoint of the child, the great waste in the school comes from his inability to utilize his experiences he gets outside the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while on the other hand he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning at school. That is the isolation of the school—its isolation from life. When the child gets into the schoolroom he has to put out of his mind a large part of the ideas, interests, and activities that predominate in his home and neighborhood. So the school being unable to utilize this everyday experience, sets painfully to work on another tack, and by a variety of means, to arouse in the child an interest in school studies. While I was visiting

in the city of Moline a few years ago, the superintendent told me that they found many children every year who were surprised to learn that the Mississippi River in the text-book had anything to do with the stream of water flowing past their homes."

How many children that recite the Beatitudes or the penitential Psalms realize that they have anything to do with the stream of human lives that passes by their home doors? Again:

"The child comes to the traditional school with a healthy body and a more or less unwilling mind, though, in fact, he does not bring both his body and mind with him; he has to leave his mind behind, because there is no way to use it in the school. If he had a purely abstract mind, he could bring it to school with him, but his is a concrete one, interested in concrete things, and unless these things get over into school life, he cannot take his mind with him."

This is written about the secular school, but its application, in a degree at least, to the Sunday-school, is apparent. It must be more closely coördinated with, or related to, life. It must depend less upon mere verbal memorizing and forms of philosophic thought and

statement which cannot be carried over into daily living.

The Book of Genesis is not genesis to the child. Daylight comes before the sun. If we think we can teach the child the Bible best in what, to an adult, is consecutive order, because it is literary order or historical order, we deceive ourselves. We are not bringing the child the truth in *his* orderly way, even if it is ours. Connection and order to us are not necessarily order or connection to him.

The true primary course progresses by topics, through concrete imagery, logically,—not by book, chronologically. The life experience of the child determines what the topics shall be, and "Testaments," as Testaments, are not in the case. Out of life the primal lesson material is to come if it is to be assimilated and lived out again. The law of Unity, says Hughes, teaches that "isolated knowledge is unproductive, and that it will not remain in the mind, even when relationship is shown by explanations or illustrations by the teacher. . . . The living process of

relationship must be thought out, and, if possible, wrought out, by the pupil himself, in order to make the knowledge a positive element in character. . . . It is wrong to give formal knowledge before laying a foundation for it by establishing apperceptive centres for it by experience."

The Sunday-school can as little afford to ignore or to repudiate those fundamental pedagogical laws upon which all great educators are now practically agreed, as can the secular school. Education is education, no matter what name the school goes by. The Sunday-school suffers from a hallucination that, because it is a religious institution, it must educate by some method peculiar to itself,—a method which too easily presumes on God's willingness to make good our sentimentally lazy shortcomings.

It will be a long time yet before we fully realize that the child under eight is not a mere diminutive adult; that he has strictly no historic consciousness, very little appreciation of the remote in cause or effect, in time or in

space; and that he has no business with any series of facts which, because of the half-wrong impression which he must needs get of them, make "utter nonsense or mere verbal cram of the most careful instruction."

The truth is that the child is robbed of his right as a child by our everlastingly thinking of him only as the coming man. We think too much of what he may be, and not enough of what he is. The perfect child is not made by forcing him into an adult mold. Even Jesus had to be a baby before he could become a man. "It is dangerous," says the immortal Froebel, "to interfere in any way with a ripening process."

Apart from this, any child may finish his mission in childhood. Out of every thousand children, over two hundred die before they reach nine years of age. Who can measure the influence which children have had upon history? I refer not merely to their attractions and sweetening influence upon us —that were adult egotism. I refer to their direct powers,—powers which we have lost,

powers which convention and artifice have pressed and dried out of us.

> "Our simple childhood sits upon a throne
> That hath more power than all the elements."

It is idle, if not immoral, to suppose that because we are trying to teach God's word to children we can therefore ignore the demands and defy the laws of child nature. God never works a miracle to relieve us from our obligation to use common sense. Our Lord respected the child's point of view, and gave it a foremost place. He never told the child to be as a man, although he did tell the man to be as a child. A child is entitled to all that goes with childhood, no matter whether we are dealing with him in secular or in "religious" matters.

The remedy for our evils lies in commanding child nature by obeying child nature; in inducting a child into a subject through his natural point of contact with life, his concrete sense experiences, his activities, his appreciations, his affections. In short, the

child's Genesis is not the man's Genesis. The story of the beginnings of things is by no means the beginning of the story of things. The child was not made for "lessons," but lessons must be made for the child. And all our teaching must look to the education of the heart through the intelligent, loving exercise of a consecrated will.

GTU Library
2400 Ridge Road
Berkeley, CA 94709
For renewals call (510) 649-2500
All items are subject to recall.

GTU Library
3 2400 00390 2198

DATE DUE

GAYLORD PRINTED IN U.S.A.